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History Graduate Certificate Portfolios

History Department

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5-20-2020

## Teaching Portfolio: Nick Whalen

Nick Whalen

*Minnesota State University, Mankato*

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# NICK WHALEN'S PORTFOLIO

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## About Me

My name is Nick Whalen. I am currently a social studies teacher in Saint Paul Public Schools at Washington Technology Magnet School. My teaching experience began as a student teacher at Washington during the 2013-2014 school year, and has continued as a contracted classroom teacher each year since. Classes I have taught at Washington Tech include 6th grade Minnesota Studies, 12th grade U.S. Government, and a variety of enrichment classes through the extended day program. In addition to my duties as a classroom teacher, I am also the Varsity Assistant Coach for the Washington Eagles baseball team.

I earned my Bachelor of Science in history from the University of Wisconsin - River Falls after graduating Magna cum Laude in the spring of 2011. Currently, I am working towards earning a graduate certificate in history from the Minnesota State University - Mankato. With this graduate certificate, I plan to offer concurrent enrollment classes for college credit in history at Washington Technology Magnet School.

Please enjoy exploring my portfolio website. This portfolio represents much of the work and scholarship I have produced and accomplished while studying at MNSU - Mankato. If you have any questions, please reach out to me using the information on my contact page.



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## History Graduate Certificate

### Learning Outcomes

#### Outcome 1:

Students will be able to analyze primary and secondary sources, and place them in historical context.

#### Outcome 2:

Students will demonstrate critical thinking through interpretation and synthesis of primary and secondary sources within historical context.

#### Outcome 3:

Students will produce an electronic portfolio that demonstrates learning in their chosen historical fields through reflective analysis of completed course projects and through specific examples of curriculum development appropriate to their professional activities.

[PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS](#)[SECONDARY SOURCE ANALYSIS](#)[SOURCE SYNTHESIS](#)

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## Primary Source Synthesis Essay and Artifact Links

### Primary Sources: Building the Skill of Historical Thinking

In his book *Why Learn History (When It's already on Your Phone)*, Sam Wineburg, Professor of history and education at Stanford University, explains that one of the most important aspects of training history teachers is put “historical thinking at the center” (pg. 123). Primary source documents are the fundamental unit of developing historical knowledge and scholarship. Therefore, in a history classroom in a secondary school setting, teaching primary source analysis and synthesis are two of the most important skills for students to develop in the pursuit of gaining the asset of historical thinking. The primary source-based experiences included in this portfolio represent means through which to achieve this historical thinking.

Examples of my use of primary source analysis with documents placed in context include an activity [examining three sets of letters written from diverse perspectives during the 1860s in Minnesota](#), a culminating experience from a course in which students are asked to [analyze primary sources as a means of critiquing a work of historical fiction for its historical value](#), and another culminating experience in which a [primary source was analyzed to understand historical conditions and decision-making in South Carolina](#). In each case, placing the primary sources of the assignment or activity into the appropriate historical context was a critical first step. Without first establishing the context, a student cannot fully realize the value of the information contained within the assignment. For example, without first executing the necessary pre-work surrounding the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, full and complete analysis of Dakota prisoner of war letters from Camp McClellan would not be possible. While each of these activities presents challenges in setting context, and in the relatively verbose language used in some instances, the challenges do not outweigh the value. Successful analysis of these sources helps to develop some of the historical thinking skills history teachers aspire to share.

In each of these artifacts, there exists a strong potential for use in a secondary school classroom. The letters from Minnesota, some written by Civil War soldiers, others by Norwegian homesteaders, and those written by the Dakota prisoners of war, offer an opportunity to view history through the multiplicity of lenses and points of view in which it happened. No one perspective can ever be defined as correct when considering the experiences of those who lived in the past; their experience was as valid then as it is now. These letters would fit perfectly into a 6th grade Minnesota Studies class, as students could be provided excerpts from the letters to help students describe changing life-ways during the time of settlement and early Minnesota statehood for the represented groups. In a high school-level American history class, students could compare and contrast the contents and experiences in the letters from each group against letters from persons in other parts of American history, including soldiers at war, new immigrants, or oppressed populations. The series of lesson plans evaluating a work of historical fiction against primary sources is already designed for classroom implementation. The sources from South Carolina could easily be extended to compare conditions in any or all of the American colonies. Documents from the other American colonies could be gathered and synthesized, such as circular letters, to demonstrate public expressions leading up to the American Revolution.

These primary sources have immense value in the classroom, as demonstrating the lived experiences of individuals who were touched by or involved in a historical event cannot be more directly achieved. The exercises are strong examples of my philosophical stance towards the use of primary sources in a secondary-level classroom: Primary sources illuminate and humanize past people and events, and may gain relevance through direct comparison with other primary and secondary sources. Most importantly, exploration and analysis of primary sources are critical steps in development of the skill of historical thinking. These experiences demonstrate my achievement in the Graduate Certificate program for history, as my analysis and contextual placement of primary sources is central to each. Furthermore, I have carefully considered each for its potential for use in the classroom and believe students would successfully engage with them.

HIST 530 - MINNESOTA: 1862 - ARTIFACT 1

HIST 530 - MINNESOTA: 1862 - ARTIFACT 2

HIST 530: BRITISH CARIBBEAN/COLONIAL AMERICA - ARTIFACT 3

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## Civil War Soldiers, Homesteaders, and Dakota POWs

### Artifact Description

Of the examples available from my graduate coursework, the strongest example of primary source analysis placed in context was an assignment from the Minnesota to 1862 course. In this assignment, students reviewed letters from three separate groups of people of whom experienced the realities of Minnesota in the 1860s in distinctly different ways. One cluster of primary sources was from the Christie brothers, who sent letters to each other and to other family members documenting their experiences in Civil War. A second cluster of primary sources was from Norwegian immigrants who had settled in and around Minnesota as homesteaders. The third cluster of primary sources was a collection of letters written by Dakota tribal members who were held as prisoners of war at Fort McClellan following the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. In the reviews, students analyzed the content of the letters, their strengths and weaknesses as reliable sources of information about the specific experience to which each was related, and the historical context in which each must be placed in order to be understood. The critiques of each cluster of sources offered within the analysis relates directly to the important context that must be provided when using primary sources as a teaching tool in the classroom; primary sources do not exist in vacuums. Nevertheless, these primary sources have immense value in the classroom, as demonstrating the lived experiences of individuals who were touched by or involved in a historical event cannot be more directly achieved. Philosophically, these primary sources represent a wealth of information about any of the three topics and should be presented to history students. Primary sources frequently give the past a “voice”, which is exactly the function fulfilled by each of these collections. The voices of the past are able to tell the story from a narrative standpoint that is only clouded by the information of the day. When primary sources reveal that the writer/speaker/etc. presents from a biased, uninformed, or misinformed point of view, that reality is a valuable piece of historical evidence in itself.



**Civil War Soldiers, Homesteaders, and Dakota POWs**

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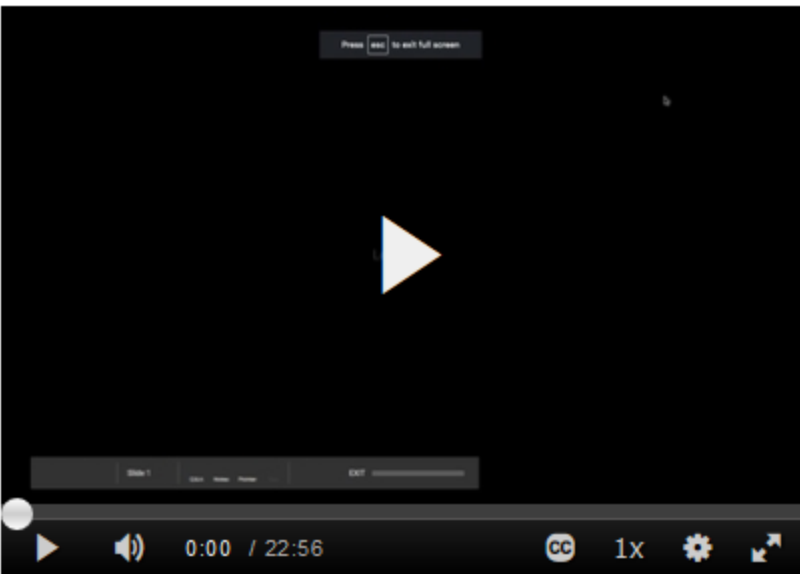
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## Evaluating Historical Fiction with Primary and Secondary Sources

### Artifact Description

Another strong example of primary source analysis placed in context from my coursework was again from the Minnesota to 1862 course. As part of the culminating assignment for the course, students were required to include a significant primary source analysis component in a potential series of lessons that may be assigned in a future course. The series of lessons I developed focused on analyzing primary and secondary sources, separately, and then using those analyses to compare historical evidence and scholarship against a piece of historical fiction about the Civil War written for middle school readers. In order to develop this series of lessons, I reviewed and analyzed several collections of primary sources relating to the Civil War mostly comprised of letters and accounts written by soldiers who served in Minnesota units. Each of these collections was contextually situated against each of the others, as well as against the secondary sources students would also review as part of the unit. This exercise is a strong example of my philosophical stance towards the use of primary sources in a secondary-level classroom; primary sources illuminate and humanize past people and events, and may gain relevance through direct comparison with other primary and secondary sources.



[Lesson Plan Slide Show Link](#)



**Lesson Plans for Evaluating Historical Fiction**  
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## Comparing British Colonies: South Carolina, Jamaica, and the American Revolution

### Artifact Description

A third strong example of primary source analysis place in context from my studies was my culminating project from the British Caribbean/Colonial America course. This assignment required students to create a comparative analysis between one of the British mainland American colonies and the British colony of Jamaica, focusing specifically on the conditions that led to Jamaica remaining loyal when the mainland colonies rebelled during the American Revolution. The colony to which I was assigned was South Carolina. As a requirement of this assignment, students were required to identify a substantial collection of primary sources to support their claims. I discovered a collection of primary sources from South Carolina dating from 1764-1776 collected and published in 1855 by R.W. Gibbes. This collection directly illuminated conditions in South Carolina and clearly distinguished it from conditions in Jamaica; these differing situations contributed to the decisions to rebel and to remain loyal, respectively. As an exercise, using contextual knowledge of the history that produced these documents was of central importance. Without context, the primary sources would not have been of value in the assignment. Generally, this assignment matched well with my philosophical stance towards the use of primary sources in the classroom, because a strong base of knowledge was built through prior coursework before analysis of the primary sources was required. Furthermore, the primary sources added to my broader understanding of the events I studied. In this way, primary sources may provide historical value unavailable from secondary sources.



**Comparing South Carolina and Jamaica Colonies**  
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## Secondary Source Synthesis Essay and Artifact Links

### Secondary Sources: Providing Opportunities to Engage in Building Historical Scholarship

Secondary sources provide historians and other learners with the intellectual capital of scholarship that exists about a topic up to that moment. These sources are the product of primary source and/or secondary source analysis, and often a synthesis of both. Sam Wineberg makes it clear throughout chapter 3 in *Why Learn History (When It’s Already on Your Phone)* that even as historiography (the study of historical thinking about a topic) shifts, and different narratives or positions in the history of history ebb and flow, it is critical to encourage anyone engaged in historical inquiry to consult a diverse set of historians’ work. A complete historiological picture of a topic or event is extremely difficult to attain, but it comes closer only after consulting a variety of secondary sources especially if those sources are allowed to contradict or challenge each other. Historians develop new knowledge and scholarship about the past when they allow for synthesis between diverse sources.

Examples of my use of secondary sources placed in context include a culminating experience from a course about Pirates of the Atlantic world in which I offer [comparative analysis of two historians’ portrayals of life as pirate in the 1720s-1730s](#), a series of [monthly reviews about different topics and periods prior to, during, and after the American Revolution](#), and an assignment using one secondary source as the contextual backdrop for another to [identify colonial typologies in North America](#). In each artifact, placing the secondary sources in historical context is an important initial task, so significant space is dedicated to establishing contextual bases. For example, in the comparative analysis of pirate social structure, a baseline of contextual information is included prior to addressing the thesis and subsequent comparison. In each review from the second artifact, the introduction serves to establish the contextual framework from which the review proceeds. The third artifact directly employs a secondary source as a context for analysis and comparison of the New France and Chesapeake Bay colonies. For students in a secondary classroom, secondary sources must be deliberately and effectively framed in context. Providing a narrative will help students analyze and evaluate the writers’ positions. Furthermore, teachers may offer important intellectual context by providing a diverse set of secondary sources on the same topic; each source will reveal unique impressions about the same topic.

Each one of these artifacts has the potential to be seamlessly and successfully integrated into a secondary classroom. Comparative analysis between secondary sources is an important skill that has the potential to reveal historiological shifts in scholarship on any given topic. Allowing students to consult more than one historian’s work on a topic will reveal how scholarship changes over time, and how two people may disagree about historical conditions. Additionally, providing students with the opportunity to review a secondary source against their own beliefs about a historical topic elevates students into higher taxonomies of learning, by providing an opportunity to evaluate information against the knowledge built over time. While analyzing and fully appreciating secondary sources takes practice in order to perfect, a secondary classroom is an ideal environment to provide the scaffolds to begin the learning process. Challenges to successful integration of these and other secondary sources are inevitable, as the skill of discerning all of the factors that may influence a writer’s position develops slowly even with much practice. Nevertheless, as assessing these factors may sometimes challenge even those individuals with much experience in historical inquiry, providing opportunities early in a student’s education will equip that individual for the task in the future.

Secondary sources have immense educational value for historians as they invite critique and opportunities to build on the knowledge of others. For secondary students, sources demonstrate the work that historians actually do: analyzing primary sources as well as the work of other historians in order to produce new knowledge about a topic. Philosophically, secondary sources also require students to evaluate information for its validity, ask questions of the information like its origins or potential biases, and to consider how primary sources support or refute a historian’s positions. When educators ask students to evaluate the thinking of someone else, it helps them to better understand their own learning processes. The value of secondary sources as teaching tools is clear in these ways.

HIST 532: PIRATES OF THE ATLANTIC WORLD - ARTIFACT 1

HIST 555: REVOLUTIONARY/EARLY NATIONAL AMERICA - ARTIFACT 2

HIST 530: BRITISH CARIBBEAN - ARTIFACT 3



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## Comparison of Social Society, Institutions, and Behavior Among Pirates: Kris Lane and Marcus Rediker

### Artifact Description

Of the examples available from my graduate certificate coursework, the strongest example of secondary source analysis placed in context was my culminating project from the Pirates of the Atlantic World course. In This assignment, I made the choice to do a comparative analysis of two secondary sources by focusing on the characterization of social life on-board vessels engaged in piracy during the last major episode of Atlantic piracy during that occurred around the 1730s. This comparison focused mostly on analyzing historiographical debate between historian Kris Lane's characterization in Pillaging the Empire: Global Piracy on the High Seas, 1500-1750, and historian Marcus Rediker's characterization in his article "Under the Banner of King Death": The Social World of Anglo-American Pirates, 1716-1726. While the two historians agree on several aspects of social organization and behavior on pirate ships, there are also several competing points as well. This example of secondary source analysis required context, as the historical facts of piracy during this period underpin the narratives and analyses the two historians espouse. Secondary sources must be clearly scaffolded with historical narrative in order to be relevant; the information the sources hold is only accessible with it. This assignment also demonstrates my philosophy for using secondary sources in the classroom: each secondary source represents the research and scholarship of the author(s), but does not necessarily represent the only possible reasonable conclusion about a topic. Sound historiographical practice and research demands inclusion of a variety of sources and writers, even those that may contradict each other, to have the full scope of truths about a topic.



**Comparison of the Presentation Social Life for Late Period Pirates**  
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## Monthly Secondary Source Reviews - 1760s to 1820s

### Artifact Description

A second example of strong secondary source analysis from my Graduate Certificate of History program is my collection of historiographical reviews of sources from the Revolutionary/Early National America course. In these reviews, students were required to compose essays that focused on secondary books, excerpts, and articles related to scholarship about the pre-revolutionary, revolutionary, and early national periods of American history. By the end of the course, each student had composed four of these historiographical review-style essays, which covered four distinct periods of chronological time. Most central to these review essays, for me, was to not spend very many words summarizing the author's/authors' argument or arguments, but rather to evaluate and analyze their positions. Nevertheless, providing the contextual framework for each review was an important part of each essay. Without supporting each of my theses with historical facts and narrative, the essay itself would be stranded in irrelevance. Furthermore, each essay was read not only by the instructor, but also by colleagues enrolled in the course. In this way, an important piece of context for secondary sources existed, as we all had been building the necessary contextual knowledge together week-by-week. This reveals another of my philosophical stances towards incorporating secondary sources in the classroom: interpretations of secondary sources may vary from person-to-person, but in order for a group to have reasonable historiographical debates about them, it must be working from an equal basis of knowledge.



**Source Review Essay 1**  
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**Source Review Essay 3**  
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**Source Review Essay 4**  
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## Typology of Two Colonies: New France and Chesapeake Bay

### Artifact Description

A third example of secondary source analysis from my coursework in this program was a brief essay using one secondary source to create context for a different secondary source. In this assignment from the British Caribbean/Colonial America course, one source described different typologies of colonies established around the world and throughout history. The second source provided descriptions of conditions in several colonies, many of which were under rule from different empires. Students task was to use the source outlining typologies to assign typological definitions to two colonies of their choosing. In this way, one secondary source provided important context for the other, and vice versa. This style of activity is a highly effective strategy to foster productive engagement with secondary sources for secondary school-level students. By using one source to support the other, students are able to practice the skill of source synthesis, which is a crucial skill for historical inquiry. This strategy matches well with my philosophy around secondary sources, that applying knowledge from one source to analyze a separate source will make each more meaningful.



Hist 530: Typologies of New France and Chesapeake Bay Colonies.pdf

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## Source Synthesis Essay and Artifact Links

### Doing the Work of Historians in High School: Primary and Secondary Source Interpretation and Synthesis

The task of building historical knowledge may include experiences during which a student’s inquiry leads to specific focus on primary sources independent of secondary sources and vice versa. However, to do the work of historians with fidelity, students must concurrently engage with both types of sources of information and data. According to the *American Historical Association* (AHA), there are five historical thinking skills students should develop in a history class including chronological thinking, historical comprehension, historical analysis and interpretation, historical research skills, and analysis and decision making concerning historical issues (source: historians.org). In teaching, my goals are to assist students in the development of each of these domains and to provide opportunities to apply these skills. Examples of my work in the Graduate Certificate of History program that demonstrate my interpretation and synthesis of primary and secondary sources also demonstrate my philosophy as a history teacher: to guide students towards functional historical thinking skills and for students to leave me having done the work of historians.

Examples of my interpretation and synthesis of primary and secondary sources placed in context include a [presentation about the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux](#), a culminating [documentary-style video about patterns in the relationships between Whites and Natives in the United States from 1600-1900](#), and a series of [weekly reading responses about different topics in Minnesota history](#). As is true in the cases of both primary and secondary source analysis, placing interpretations and syntheses developed from simultaneous analysis of both types of sources in context remains an important first step. For example, in each of my weekly reading journals in the third artifact, the first paragraph served to establish basic historical context while also presenting my thesis for the rest of the essay. Each week, the primary and secondary sources informed the context. In each of my examples, I dedicated space to developing historical context, and in a few cases, I also provided space for contemporary/current context as the topics have been acutely relevant recently. The Treaty of Traverse des Sioux presentation and the third reading journal (labeled week 15) presented opportunities to connect historical topics with current historiological debates and educational issues. Students appreciate clear connections between the past and the present, which inspires me to demonstrate clear examples. Furthermore, these two artifacts are opportunities to analyze historical issues, which is an AHA skill.

In my classroom, these examples of my work may be adapted to meet my goal of helping students develop historical thinking skills. The documentary-style video about White-Native relations in the United States prior to 1900 showcases many of these skills. It is constructed very much like a National History Day project. Students in my classes create History Day projects every year, and frequently compete against other students in competitions. In constructing projects like this one, students develop research skills, historical comprehension, chronological thinking, and interpretive skills. History Day projects, documentaries or otherwise, present challenges for secondary students. I would certainly provide more guidance and scaffolds for students when engaging in this depth of research and during the construction phase of their physical artifact. Success on these projects grows from the process, which is always rewarding to cultivate. Reading journals are also incorporated into my curriculum. One addition that I include to reading journals beyond my artifacts is to try encourage students to make connections between modern-day issues or situations and the historical topics the students have read about and explored. I have successfully integrated these reading journals into into both Minnesota Studies courses for 6th graders and U.S. Government courses for 12th graders. Establishing contemporary relevance usually increases engagement while providing students with a space to express their passions.

The AHA outlines five historical thinking skills students should develop in a history course. Through the use of research projects like National History Day, text-analyzing and -synthesizing assignments like reading journals, and presentations about historical topics and their contemporary relevance, my goal is to help students develop each of those five AHA skills. Historical inquiry requires students to be able to examine and analyze both primary and secondary sources independently, but students truly experience the work of historians when analysis is joined with synthesizing different sources. My hope is that students leave my classroom having done the work of historians.

HIST 530 - MINNESOTA: 1862 - ARTIFACT 1

HIST 555: REVOLUTIONARY/EARLY NATIONAL AMERICA - ARTIFACT 2

HIST 530 - MINNESOTA: 1862 - ARTIFACT 3

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## Treaty of Traverse des Sioux (1851) Slideshow Presentation

During the course of completing the graduate certificate of history, one experience in which I effectively interpreted and synthesized primary and secondary sources in context was an assignment from the Minnesota to 1862 course about the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux. In this assignment, students were required to create a presentation that could be used in a secondary history course about the treaty between the government and some of the Dakota bands. In order to successfully construct the presentation, I used secondary interpretations to outline actions and actors for the government and to frame the Dakota perspective. Then, I analyzed the primary text of the treaty to contrast its literal meaning versus how it was comprehended by the Dakota. Finally, I provided space for discussion of important relevant connections from the recent past. The project is situated well in context because I used knowledge gained through the course to create a narrative framework for the presentation. It would translate directly into a secondary classroom as it was developed specifically with this purpose in mind; the slideshow is ready for classroom use. While it is always challenging to fully assess all of the motivating factors for historical figures, this presentation attempts to use the into-through-beyond style of inquiry in synthesis of both secondary and primary sources. Generally, this assignment demonstrates my philosophy of primary/secondary source synthesis because both types of sources are necessary to frame the others and to offer a complete explanation of a topic.



**Treaty of Traverse des Sioux Outline and Slideshow**  
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## Patterns in White-Native Relations, 1600-1900

Another experience during which I demonstrated interpretation and synthesis of primary and secondary sources was my culminating project from the Revolutionary and Early National America course. In this assignment, students were required to identify a research topic related to a topic covered during the course about which to create a documentary-style project. In my documentary, I incorporated a variety of primary images in support of my secondary-based historical analysis. This assignment, more than any other I completed during my program, reminded me of the process and delivery of a National History Day project. I am a firm believer in the value of History Day because it asks students to consider long- and short-term causes of an event, as well as the short- and long-term effects of the same event. Furthermore, in all formats, students must consider representative visuals in order to support their claims. Employing visual primary sources in support of a claim is an important skill for students to develop. Philosophically, I instruct that if you can tell a reader/viewer a point, it becomes even more convincing if you can also show the reader/viewer proof of the same point.



Hist 555 - Patterns in White-Native Relations: 1600-1900 Paper.pdf  
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## Reading Journals: Topics in Minnesota History to 1860s

A third experience during which I demonstrated analysis and synthesis of primary and secondary sources was in my weekly reading journals for Minnesota to 1862 course. Reading journals required students to analyze assigned primary and secondary sources and then explain thematic realities each revealed about this region and state's history prior to the U.S-Dakota War of 1862. Readings varied in topic from week, but usually included both primary and secondary sources. In each of the journals, I situated the documents in historical context in the introductory paragraph along with the thesis for the essay. Usually, the context was drawn from the secondary source narrative readings for the week. The biggest challenges I faced in these reading journals was pushing my analysis to focus on different aspects of Minnesota history from week-to-week. My goal was to explore many different perspectives from different eras, so my focus frequently shifted to new topics. Reading journals of this style lend themselves well to use in a secondary classroom, as students are asked to engage directly with the text as reading occurs. I can envision asking students to read secondary and primary sources concurrently in this manner in order to respond to prompts that require source-type synthesis. This activity matches well with my philosophy regarding synthesis between different sources of information: students must consult both primary and secondary sources in order to affirm or refute claims. Complete historical inquiry demands that the writer uses sources to present a position.



**Reading Journal Example 1**  
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## Education and Work Experience

### Education

#### Undergraduate Education:

University of Wisconsin - River Falls

Bachelor of Science - History

Minor - Social Studies

Secondary Education (5-12) Social Studies Certificate

*magna cum laude*

#### Graduate Education:

Minnesota State University - Mankato

Graduate Certificate - History

### Work Experience:

#### Saint Paul Public Schools

Washington Technology Magnet School (Since 2014-2015 School Year)

Social Studies Teacher

6th Grade Minnesota Studies

12th Grade U.S. Government

History Day Program

Varsity Assistant Coach - Baseball

#### Minnesota Institute for Talented Youth

Enrichment Program Teacher (2015-2017)

History Day Class

#### Minnesota Historical Society

Interactive Exhibit Features Development (2016-2017)

Advisor to Development of Minnesota's Greatest Generation "Play the Past"

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